



Testimony Before the Public Health Committee

By Chris McNaboe, Executive Director, Horizons

February 27, 2013

In Opposition to House Bill No. 6005

Good afternoon members of the Public Health Committee. My name is Chris McNaboe. I am the Executive Director of Horizons, a not-for-profit agency that has been in operation for over 33 years. The purpose of Horizons is to create and sustain person-centered opportunities for each person with special needs where they live, learn, work and play.

I am here today in strong opposition to House Bill No. 6005.

HB No. 6005 was introduced to the Connecticut legislature just recently but will set our State back more than forty years and compromise the great gains we have made in promoting civil rights and social justice for Connecticut's citizens with developmental disabilities.

HB No. 6005 will make it illegal to close State operated group homes and the Regional Centers. This will be a sad moment in our history should it become law. While the bill implies all State operated group homes, it specifically mentions the Hartford Regional Center, Richard House and that is the place I would like to focus on today. I have a personal connection to the Hartford Regional Center as I was employed there from 1969 to 1976 as a residential worker and recreation aide.

The 1970's were a time of great changes in the way society thought about how and where people with developmental disabilities could and should live. And the leadership at the Hartford Regional Center recognized the need for change locally and, as such, had a traditional Colonial Style home - Richard House - moved to the grounds of the institution as a demonstration project, to show that people with developmental disabilities made personal growth and thrived when they lived in a smaller, home- like setting rather than in congregate groups of 30 or 40 in hospital style wards, surrounded by cinderblock walls.

We were enlightened by these efforts and collectively we worked in partnership with others to support most of the people who lived in these cinderblock, institutional settings to move to homes, apartments and condos in neighborhoods and communities across Connecticut. The results of this effort have been nothing short of remarkable. People who never worked before, now have jobs and pay taxes. People who never had a choice about what they would eat or what they would wear frequent the malls and their neighborhood grocery store. All are now able to enjoy the simple pleasures in life that most of us take for granted.

I am personally connected to several of the people who lived at the Hartford Regional Center in the 70's and 80's: Joyce, Spuddy, Elaine, Ellen, Raymond, Lisa, Betsy. I see these folks during the year and know they now live in homes, apartments and condos supported by private agencies and they are prospering, making friends, learning every day, sharing their joy with others and being valued members of their community.

Over the past 34 years, I have also witnessed hundreds more people with developmental disabilities make great gains and experience excellent quality of life in homes across Connecticut as the Executive Director of Horizons, a not-for-profit agency.

In this role, I am well aware of the cost of providing services in community-based settings and the hard fiscal choices you face as legislators. And for this reason alone, Bill # 6005 would be a huge mistake and truly an outrage at this time of budget cuts, recessions and fiscal austerity.

The cost to support one person for one year at the Hartford Regional Center is upwards of \$450,000. Individuals with developmental disabilities are supported in community-based homes for about a quarter of that per year, with the highest rates of support being provided only to people with significant needs. Currently, the private sector provides 85% of all of the services to people with developmental disabilities in Connecticut in a cost-effective manner based on personal and family choice.

At Horizons, we supported many people while they moved from Mansfield Training School, once Connecticut's largest, and at times, most notorious institution before it closed in 1993. We worked side by side with parents who were afraid to move their children out of the only place they ever had, fearing for what difficulties they might encounter.

We saw firsthand the triumphs and the changes of heart as individuals did better than anyone thought was possible. After a few months of living in his new group home, one parent told us in tears, "I never thought my son would be able to talk and now he does. I can't thank you enough." You're never too old to learn new things and never too old to try.

It is these truths - the human rights truths, the civil rights truths and the fiscal truths that I urge you as legislators to consider as you cast your vote, in opposition to House Bill No. 6005.

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